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ABSTRACT

This document presents guidelines for use by museum staff members as they evaluate their institutional capabilities and programs. Guidelines are based on a new evaluation perspective--naturalistic evaluation--which can help museum staff assess their programs in a more interpretative, less judgmental way. Naturalistic evaluation is characterized by concern with spontaneous activities rather than pre-stated and/or overly formal objectives, ability to respond to staff and audience requirements for different kinds of information, recognition that different values and perspectives are equally valid, stress on wide-ranging implications, participation by a wide range of people who are to be served by the study, and orientation toward a search for meaning of an entire experience such as a museum visit. Interview strategies include directing the interviewer to get a flavor of as much of the system as possible, identify problems that influence the situation under investigation, and select problems that seem the most likely to provide vital evidence. Particularly useful types of data include descriptive data about settings, accurate descriptions of visitor actions and behaviors, direct quotes, clues to past museum policies on various types of exhibits, and observation of wear-spots on carpet near exhibits. Interviewers are particularly good at naturalistic evaluation if they are unafraid of new situations, curious, unobtrusive, good listeners, and relatively value-free with respect to the situation under study. Interviewers can work toward mastering naturalistic evaluation procedures if they perform self-training exercises such as memory tests, mini-observations, mock informant interviews, and debriefing reports. (DB)

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A PRELIMINARY GUIDE FOR CONDUCTING NATURALISTIC EVALUATION IN STUDYING MUSEUM ENVIRONMENTS

1978

SP 013 051

by

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GENERAL PREMISES OF NATURALISTIC EVALUATION
AN OVERVIEW

There are a variety of forces impacting on museums throughout the country to make them more accountable to the publics they serve. Much of the pressure comes from the federal government whose increasing scrutiny of all federally funded programs is exemplified by the 1977 Evaluation Conference sponsored by the National Museum Act, administered by the Smithsonian Institution, which provided a clear mandate for museum evaluation. Similarly, museum patrons who have been pledging unquestionable support in the past now are more interested in knowing what impact their dollar contributions are having in terms of the programs and services museums offer. In short, in an age of public accountability, there is a prevailing expectation that museums will be evaluating their institutional capabilities and programs. And it is our belief that museum evaluation studies can and should contribute to the general understanding of a particular museum's educational and socio-cultural impact by raising new questions as well as by providing information.

As museum persons are discovering, however, the costs of doing evaluation are greater than the costs of the personnel and the data displays that show up on the ledger. The staff is distracted from ordinary duties; visitors are sometimes diverted from some portion of their museum experience; and to many people the evaluation is a threat.

Yet evaluation can offer a greater understanding of what is going on, a feeling of greater security that what appeared to be working is working, a better sense of different points of view about what the problems are, and a description of how the staff functions to provide quality experiences for its visitors.

There are problems inherent in this latter effort. For example, there is a danger in trying to simplify the museum mission. There is a risk in confusing education with indoctrination (of the visitor). Equally important is the recognition by museum personnel that the quality and meaning of the experience is quite a personal determination -- one that different visitors make for different reasons. Evaluation that captures these differences and promotes some understanding in the process becomes justifiable and ultimately beneficial.

What are needed, therefore, are evaluation methods appropriately suited to the museum context so as to both respond to the mandate for increased evaluation activities and at the same time be useful to the museums themselves. While some evaluation activities have occurred

over the past three decades, they have been predominantly classical/ experimental studies that have focused on isolated psychological variables, i.e. visitor fatigue, amount of time spent viewing an object. Such forces have not allowed insight into the complex impact that museums have on visitors' experiences. Moreover, past studies have not been able to inform programmatic decisions. Finally, much evaluation has been highly critical -- composed of negative punitive statements which typically discourage, anger, and disappoint the evaluation audience.

We believe that in order to best serve people involved in or affected by any museum program, evaluation must guide and inform the decisions that need to be made. That is, evaluation must respond to people's concerns. Additionally evaluation must provide an in-depth understanding of what impact the museum program is having upon the consumer. In other words, what kind of experience does the visitor have, and what is the value of that experience?

It is to these ends that we offer a new evaluation perspective which we refer to as Naturalistic Evaluation. Evaluation becomes naturalistic if it: (1) orients more directly to current and spontaneous activities; behaviors and expressions rather than to some static set of pre-stated formal objectives, (2) responds to staff and audience requirements and interest in different kinds of information, and (3) accounts for the different values and perspectives that exist whenever the questions of impact and/or effect are introduced. Naturalistic Evaluation takes a broad, holistic view of the program, exhibit or institution being studied, is more interpretative than judgmental, and requires participation from a wide range of people who are to be served by the study effort. Therefore, when we speak of Naturalistic Evaluation we refer to procedures that attempt to capture what actually occurs in museum settings. In other words, procedures that focus on persons as they are engaged in their museum experience or as they are impacted upon by some museum exhibit or program. It is a dynamic inquiry process demanding extensive interaction between evaluator and participants. In this sense, data collection episodes (observations, interviews, etc.) require documenting natural behavior and initiating natural conversations. Perhaps most importantly, Naturalistic Evaluation depends upon relating natural behaviors and expressions to the context in which they arise. Furthermore, it is aimed at understanding what impact a museum exhibit or program is having on all those concerned. This suggests that persons experiencing the program or exhibit in question should have the opportunity to describe their experiences, assess the quality thereof, and comment on the meaning of those experiences to them. Thus, Naturalistic Evaluation is directed toward a search for meaning.

And it is this search for meaning that distinguishes Naturalistic Evaluation from other field oriented evaluation strategies. Essentially,

it is an operation form that links the evaluator directly with the object of study. The purpose is to uncover the multiple realities and multiple perceptions that exist and are provoked as people experience the museum environment -- it reveals the configuration of meaning that emerges when different people are exposed to a common stimulus.

Procedurally, Naturalistic Evaluation unfolds through successive phases and iterative strategies. It contours itself to the realities that exist in situ. And it responds to the subtle and distinct variations in people's expectations, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Issues are identified, discussed and clarified by sampling program participants, administrators, exhibit staff, and of course, visitors. From these discussions new questions are raised, more data is sought; constant feedback is provided; new decision needs arise; and, so it goes. The evaluation design is not formulated in advance, it is not static; rather, it continuously evolves and is modified as the evaluator interacts with people in and about the museum.

This evolving evaluation mode is particularly useful when those seeking an evaluation are unsure (or do not understand) what it is they wish to have evaluated. In some ways, Naturalistic Evaluation teaches the staff or audience as it emerges. Presenting the initial evaluation feedback to the staff and allowing their discussion on the data shapes the continuing inquiry.

In essence, our approach is based on the assumption that evaluation should "respond" to the needs, interests, and perceptions of the audience rather than rest upon measurement criteria established a priori and/or in absence of input from the actual recipients of the evaluation. The audience for the study shapes the direction of the inquiry. Philosophically, the approach legitimizes that there are multiple realities and multiple truths. Thus, unlike the majority of investigatory efforts, the present approach elicits, considers, and builds upon the in-depth information that is provided by its many respondents. The final data interpretations portray similarities and differences in perceptions while describing the origins and context for such agreements and discrepancies.

This guide is first a series which is aimed at operationalizing the Naturalistic Evaluation framework. There are important matters such as sampling, observation, data analysis, etc. that are not treated here but will be addressed in subsequent works. The focus here will concern interview strategies that comprise a substantial part of the evaluation process. The techniques described herein are generic to a wide range of museum environments. The intention of this guide is to serve as a reminder for naturalistic evaluators of the subtleties involved in understanding the complexity of natural settings and the multitude of perceptions that exist in those settings.

PROCEDURES OF NATURALISTIC EVALUATION

We have learned from our past experiences in museum evaluation that there are many stories to be told. In our accumulating work in museum study, we remain impressed with the range of extant perceptions, beliefs, hopes, and fears expressed by people involved in or affected by museum programs and exhibits, particularly those charged with making decisions regarding their future. For example, as our recent studies at the Smithsonian Institution indicated, exhibit and design staff desired studies that could reveal the reasons why exhibits work so well in some aspects, yet fail in others. The procedures of Naturalistic Evaluation outlined below provide a strategy for uncovering the subtleties and complexities to inform these and other kinds of queries.

The Interviewer

A critical and primary component of Naturalistic Evaluation is the individual conducting the interviews and making systematic observations. An interviewer is an investigator gathering evidence. Like Columbo or Woodward and Bernstein, he/she amasses data about a particular problem by watching, searching for clues, following leads, interviewing key informants, and making interpretations from the evidence in order to reconstruct events. The interviewer is concerned with facts. Impressions are not useful unless verified by investigation. Observations are carefully recorded; prejudgment is scorned; judgments flow from the evidence. The goal for investigators is not absolute truth but plausibility -- what seems to be true. Observations and reports are pieced together carefully and woven into a persuasive case.

Naturalistic Evaluation allows the interviewer to gather evidence about processes, circumstances, or other observable conditions. It helps answer questions like:

How are things happening?
What things are happening that we don't usually measure?
Under what conditions are they happening?
Why are they happening?

The reactions to an exhibit, for example, can be influenced by how the specimens are presented, what experiences the visitor brings, the physical conditions of the exhibit or building. Unless data are gathered on these factors and others -- as well as on items such as the intended effects of the exhibit, the constraints on the exhibit, and the constraints on the visitor -- the picture of an exhibit's

impact may be incomplete. By watching and probing, sensitive observers can obtain valuable information about crucial things that often go unrecorded.

The style of questioning in Naturalistic Evaluation enables the interviewers to let each person tell his/her story as he/she perceives it. Broad, open-ended questions usually yield responses rich in information. Sensitive probes help to clarify, specify, and underscore what is important to the informant. Asking questions about processes and conditions will tell the interviewer a lot about what is happening, how it is happening, and perhaps most important, why it is happening.

Strategy for Naturalistic Evaluation

Any situation (exhibit, program, innovation) under study is likely to be part of a larger institution or system made up of mutually dependent, interconnected parts. Thus, a museum program is likely to depend on publicity from the P.R. department, financial support from the bugetary department, and content development from the research team. Evidence about the situation is likely to be found throughout the system in which it is embedded. Changes in the situation are likely to cause changes in other parts of the system, and vice versa. Situations, in short, do not exist in vacuums. To account for this the investigator should observe the following steps:

Step 1. Get a flavor of as much of the system as possible.

Step 2. Identify those problems or parts of the system that influence the situation under investigation.

Step 3. Select the problems or parts that seem most important and might provide vital evidence.

Let us say that visitor interest (or the lack of it) regarding an exhibit is a concern voiced by many people. In step 1, to get the flavor of the entire situation, you, as investigator, might interview an array of persons who can potentially provide insights on the area of interest -- staff representing various inputs to the exhibit/design process (curators, programmer, designers, script researchers), administrators functioning at various levels of a system, and so on.

In step 2, you identify which problems occur in which parts of the system. Develop an understanding of the problem from the perspective of each group of informants. Determine how representative certain feelings seem to be. Consider the possibility that several groups may view the problem similarly. Remember, situations do not exist in vacuums; neither do perceptions.

In step 3, you select aspects of the problem that seem to be of greatest concern. Phrase a small number of questions that address the problem. Identify and interview respondents (i.e. visitors) to gather their perceptions on these questions. Attempt to elicit from your informants specific solutions and what they view as barriers to solution. Given the solutions and the barriers, what recommendations might the respondent offer?

The interview processes of steps 1 and 2 are most likely to occur with museum personnel, while the interviews in step 3 will be those conducted with museum visitors. The process as outlined is designed to serve as a general guide for the investigatory process. In order to implement the three-step strategy, you will need to know exactly what types of data might be useful and how to get them.

Naturalistic Evaluation Data: What They Are and How to Get Them

Naturalistic evaluators record facts and put them together into a meaningful picture. As you observe a situation, do not consciously attempt to memorize it. Simply be aware. To the greatest extent possible, block out your emotions and logic. Just try to think of yourself as the world's greatest sensing device -- as a computer in touch with everything around you. Be observant, but do not consciously try to remember. When you're thinking about trying to remember, you can't be absorbing the situation under observation. After an observation, sit down in a quiet place and make notes about what happened. You'll be surprised how accurately you'll be able to record the facts -- if you do so shortly after the event.

Five types of data or facts are often important to the observer:

1. Descriptive data about settings. Record observations about the physical or institutional setting surrounding the situation. The setting may include a description of the "actors," their "costumes and props" and the "stage" on which they appear. Record only what you see and know -- this is a descriptive step. The recording can be put together later in order to interpret what is or is not important.

Useful information about settings must be based on fact, not impression. The following example demonstrates the difference between facts that will stand public scrutiny and build a plausible case and impressions that are without evidence.

Example 1.

FACTS: The exhibit is most crowded in the early afternoon (1 pm - 3 pm). On three days out of the four I observed the crowds were steady. I saw few visitors who did not stop to read at least 2 labels.

IMPRESSION: The exhibit is fun -- perhaps this is why the visitors go there.

2. Accurate descriptions of actions and behaviors. Record exactly whatever is done that relates to the situation you are investigating. Once again be aware of the difference between fact and impression.

Example 2A.

FACT: Visitor X commented, "I've always wanted to see this" and called his friend back to observe the display. He then read the label to his friend.

IMPRESSION: There were several interested visitors in the gallery, especially one man.

Example 2B.

FACT: The slide-tape film was operating, but I couldn't make out the image or the narration.

IMPRESSION: The projector seemed to be defective.

3. Quotable quotes. Record the key words in a train of thought or discussion exactly as they are stated. Notice the discussion's general flow as well as specifics. You need to pick out exactly what is said and by whom. As much as possible, block out your feelings about what is happening. Reason and emotion only get in the way at this point. You can interpret the data later. Aim for direct quotes as much as possible, since they provide the best material for later

analysis. The best way to do this is to listen and take abbreviated notes, then isolate yourself immediately afterward and reconstruct what was said and done. Most people are amazed at how well they can do this.

Some evicence is not readily noticeable; it is unobtrusive. The two most frequently encountered types of unobtrusive evidence are "trace effects" and "wear spots."

4. Traces are indicators of past behavior, accumulations, or deposits of evidence providing clues to some past activity. Written materials are particularly relevant for getting information about background, solutions, regulations, and policies. Some of the most useful documents include newspapers, policy and planning statements, demographic data, guidebooks, local-state-federal regulations on all subjects, laws, budgets, and relevant books or articles. Such literature helps investigators find out about new ideas, about what ought to be happening, and about how to make it happen. Relevant written materials can yield information of value to almost any conceivable responsive research project. But remember that traces may have many different meanings. Record your comments without interpretation at first and piece them together later.

5. Wear spots are measures of the use of particular equipment or activities. A successful exhibit, for instance, is likely to have well-worn areas. Worn rugs might indicate the popularity of various parts of an exhibit. Evidence from "wear spots" and "trace" indicators is particularly useful for studying problems in which the "intrusions" of the researcher make the problem impossible to study. Consider this example which is somewhat removed from museum environments but which illustrates the point: suppose we want to discover the extent of drinking in a town that has officially "gone dry." Clearly we are not likely to get much from door-to-door interviews. People will be reluctant to say anything except that they follow the law. In the face of such difficulty one researcher invented an imaginative unobtrusive measure. He went up and down alleys counting the number of discarded liquor bottles. Messy, but it worked. 1/

As you gather data, observe natural and typical settings wherever possible. In general you will be trying to discover things that are par for the course. The observers who concentrate on deviant cases leave themselves open to charges of manipulation and inaccuracy. Aim to observe a variety of typical circumstances in which the usual

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1/ Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobsen, Action Research: A New Style of Politics in Education, IRE Report (Boston: Institute for Responsive Education, 1974), pp. 26-27.

processes and conditions come into play. While observing, it is important to be as sensitive and nondisruptive as possible, so that situations reflect reality. Your observation strategies should not affect those being observed nor should they detract from your ability to observe.

About Respondents

During steps 1 and 2 of the strategy for Naturalistic Evaluation, the interviewer identifies key people who can provide important evidence that is otherwise unobtainable. Certainly, some people have special skills and knowledge that have bearing on particular situations. Far more important here, however, are insiders, people who have access to information that only a few people know about.

A reliable informant in the first case may be an administrator who has a broad view of the visitors, staff, and other administrators in a museum environment. Curators, designers, writers, or docents are examples of people who have access to key areas and can be helpful in focusing on appropriate but specific concerns. Be aware, however, that "experts" or decision-makers are not always useful informants; sometimes they have a narrow and biased viewpoint. Look for the "switchboard," someone who handles all the messages but has no axe to grind.

The value of all informants is considerably increased if they are willing to give you hard facts. What happened at the last meeting, executive session, or in the back room? What are some of the behind-the-scene facts of a matter?

Respondents may be reluctant to tell too much, especially at first. Emphasize that their responses will be used anonymously and thus kept confidential. Convince them of your sincerity and integrity; question them carefully; and be patient. Drawing out informants can be frustrating and painstakingly slow, but it has exciting potential.

Journalists understand data gathering very well. In All The President's Men, Watergate investigators Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward provided many vivid examples of working with informants. The following sequence is among the most instructive.

> The Bookeeper was looking at Bernstein's coffee cup again, having second thoughts "There are too many people watching me," she said. "They know I'm privy and they watch me like a hawk." She was convinced her phones were tapped.

"How much money was paid out?"
"A lot."
"More than half a million?"
"You've had it in print."
Finally it clicked. Sometimes he could be incredibly slow, Bernstein thought to himself. It was the slush fund of cash kept in Stan's safe.
"I never kenw it was a 'security fund' or whatever they called it," she said, "until after June 17, I just thought it was an all-purpose political fund that you didn't talk about -- like to take fat cats to dinner, but all strictly legal."
"$350,000 in dinners? How was it paid out?"
"Not in one chunk. I know what happened to it, I added up the figures." There had been a single sheet of paper on which the account was kept; it had been destroyed, the only record.
"It was a lined sheet with names on about half the sheet, about fifteen names with the amount distributed to each person next to the name. I saw it more than once. The amounts kept getting bigger."
She had updated the sheet each time a disbursement was made. Sloan knew the whole story too. He had handed out the money. Bernstein asked about the names again. He was confused because there were about 15 names on the sheet, yet she thought only six were involved. Which six?
"Go down the GAO report; I think they've all been before the grand jury. They're easy to isolate; a couple have been names in the press but not necessarily in connection with this." 2/

Unfortunately the respondents are not always as exciting as this, but neither are they always so difficult, and rarely are they dull.

Interviewers may find themselves routinely following up leads or interviewing people who are in the know. Regardless of the situation, the use of reliable respondents requires perseverance, imagination, sensitivity to hints and clues, and willingness to ask tough questions. Natural Evaluation is among the most productive and efficient of research techniques.

2/ Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, All the President's Men (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 67-68.

Who Can Do Naturalistic Evaluation?

Naturalistic Evaluation takes sensitivity, concentration, and an open mind. The objective is to observe and record, without prejudice, situations exactly as they happened. You as interviewer are extracting the facts from a situation. The interpretation takes place afterward.

Some personal and situational characteristics benefit the process of Naturalistic Evaluation. Consider the following:

- People who are unafraid to enter into new situations, but who can also be unobtrusive make good naturalistic evaluators.
- Good listeners make good observers, as do people with a wide range of interests.
- People who are relatively unfamiliar or value-free with respect to situations make good participant/observers because they don't feel compelled to interpret. Pick people with the most potential to "go in clean" whenever you can.
- Curious, inquisitive people are good candidates for Naturalistic Evaluation.
- Informants may be prejudiced and may slant the information they give you, so probe carefully and verify information by checking it against the statements of other witnesses.

The last section of this guide offers a list of additional skills and qualities of an interviewer.

Self-Training Exercises

(1) Mini-observations

Make a fifteen minute visit to any situation (e.g., laundromats, restaurants) and immediately afterward record all data observed. Following that, with other interviewers, in one or several groups, observe together and report in turn on what you saw.

This exercise will enable you to become more aware of the wide variety of things that are observable and what is significant about the setting, the overall situation.

(2) Conversations

Attempt to memorize the key parts of a conversation. Don't try to take on more than a half hour or so the first time. Record the data immediately. Piece it together. What does it say?

This exercise is a good way to learn to tune in to a conversation. You'll find that you can remember more than you thought you could.

(3) Memory Tests

Try to tune in on ten-minute segments of other people's conversation, for instance, a seminar or group meeting. Who said what to whom and in what sequence? Once again, record the data immediately after leaving the situation.

(4) On-site Observations

Visit a museum/zoo setting in a team of two or three. Observe the scenes and the actors. What are the major activities? What are the people like? Is there much interaction? What socio-economic characteristics stand out?

(5) Mock Informant Interviews

Practice the interviews needed to get information from informants if you will be using the interview technique.

Have one person conduct the mock interview while another plays the role of informant. Introductory questions should be written in advance and reviewed after the simulated interview. You might ask each other to describe your job, a committee you serve on, or interesting experiences.

If possible, interview someone about a subject on which he/she has more information than he/she wants to reveal. Anyone who plans to do interviewing of informants needs practice. The more reluctant you anticipate the informants will be, the more important it is to work on this exercise.

(6) Trace Effects and Wear Spots

If you buy a coke from a vendor and notice that when you throw the flip top away that the rubbish barrel is full, you may conclude that the vendor is doing a brisk business. A display windowpane with nose and finger smudges is likely to indicate that little people are stopping at the window to look. Wine bottles in the staff lounge obviously mean something, although we may not know exactly what!

These are trace effects. The dirty or worn rugs in front of the display is a wear spot. For an entire week, note the traces and wear spots you see as you go through your daily routine. List them each night when you get home. This will sensitize you to this valuable, often overlooked form of evidence. (Caution: People may think you strange if you engage in this behavior too long or too zealously!)

(7) Group Study

Attend three or four meetings of the same group, making Naturalistic Evaluation notes immediately after each. After the sequence of meetings, list each piece of evidence on a separate card and then put the cards together. What story does the evidence tell? What is the group about? How do they see themselves? Is their real business the same as their stated purpose? Can you sum up the meetings in one or two sentences? Discuss your findings with a colleague. If you plan to observe groups, this is an important training exercise and well worth the effort.

GENERAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

This section describes in more detail the "how to's" of interviewing. Remember that we are discussing two different interview situations -- one that occurs in steps 1 and 2 with administrators, staff, program developers, etc.; the other that occurs in step 3, in interactions with the visitor. There are behaviors and strategies common to both situations however. It is strongly recommended that the interviewer carefully study this discussion of shared strategies which details necessities of step 1 and step 2 interviews, and the set of guidelines for interviewing visitors (step 3) that follows this section. An understanding of the terms below will be useful in the study of these interviewing techniques.

Terminology

Respondent -- the person being interviewed (also called interviewee).

Rapport -- a comfortable relationship between the interviewer and the respondent.

Opinion question -- a question about a person's attitude, viewpoint, or belief about an issue, problem, or situation.

Factual question -- a question about events that actually take place or facts about the respondent.

Natural language recording -- writing down word-for-word what the respondent says, not a summary.

Probing -- a technique used to encourage the respondent to clarify his answer, add to his answer, clear up irrelevant responses. All probes must be done using neutral conversation, so as not to influence the respondent's answer.

Interview format -- the set of questions that have been selected to present to each respondent.

An Outline of the Interview Sequence

1. Plan the interview setting, (which may range from an office setting to a museum corridor).
2. Prepare for the interview. (Know your subject material and broad questions to pursue.)
3. Establish rapport with the respondent and ask the questions.
4. Record responses in brief form.
5. Thank the respondent for cooperating.

In addition, more formal interviews, such as those with staff, administrators, etc. require that you:

- set up the interview well in advance
- confirm interview arrangements shortly before arranged time
- arrive punctually
- indicate that you may be speaking again with respondent

Setting Up the Interview

Identify the respondent. Get his/her name from another interviewee or from a list prepared by relevant administrative/staff personnel.

Establish personal contact with the interviewee. During this contact give a brief statement explaining the purpose of the interview and telling how you received the respondent's name.

Arrange an appointment. It is important that each investigator contact his/her respondents well in advance of the interview.

If possible get such data as full name and position so that the interview will not have to begin with dull facts.

Continue contact with the respondent by sending a printed statement explaining the purpose of the interview and a general estimate of the time commitment for the respondent.

Depending on the time lapse between initial contact and time of interview, it may be necessary to reconfirm the appointment. Generally, if there is more than a two-day period intervening, reconfirm by telephone.

Preparing for the Interview

Dress appropriately for interviews. First impressions often determine whether or not the interview will be granted. Clothing should suit the environment in which you are working. Try to put yourself in the place of the respondent and think how he/she would react in your attire.

Have the proper recording tools (sharpened pencils, two working pens, small writing tablets).

If you will be more than three minutes late for the interview, call the respondent and assure him/her that you will be arriving shortly. This courtesy is crucial.

Have a positive attitude. The interviewer must feel that the study is important and worthwhile.

Arriving at the Interview and Arranging an Appropriate Setting

Arrive shortly before the interview.

Tell the respondent who you are and whom you represent. Remind him/her about your previous communication and explain what you are doing now. Have information about the study clearly in mind to stimulate his/her interest.

Mention that all information he/she may give will be kept confidential.

Tell the respondent how he/she was chosen.

Suggest the course of action you desire; e.g., "I would like to come in and talk with you." Do not give the respondent the option to refuse. For example, do not say, "May I talk with you?"

Be prepared to answer questions such as "How long will this take?" "Is this confidential?" "Will my name get printed somewhere?" "Who are you?"

Search tactfully for appropriate seating arrangements. Try to have the respondent sitting across from you, not beside you where he/she can see your writing and the questions -- he/she

may be distracted or want to change his/her answers. Explain that you are taking notes to make sure that you understand exactly what he/she means.

Avoid an audience. Having others around not only may cause unnecessary distraction, but also may bias the respondent's answers. Ask graciously if there is somewhere you can talk privately but do not make the respondent feel he/she has to disturb the general routine of the environment; this could cause hostile reactions.

When everything is arranged, begin questioning promptly.

Establishing Rapport with the Respondent and Asking the Questions

Show the respondent you are genuinely interested and that you accept him/her as a person. Be warm and responsive. The interaction between interviewer and respondent must be pleasant and satisfying. Each interviewer must approach each respondent with a positive, self-assured, but matter-of-fact manner. Friendliness, not familiarity, is an asset. A compliment, such as admiring the office, talking about the museum or common experiences, or pleasantly remarking about the community, will often break the ice and establish rapport.

Create a permissive atmosphere. The respondent must feel free to express his/her viewpoint, and you must show understanding, acceptance, and interest.

Do not use pressure or coercion by showing impatience or giving your own ideas, reactions or preferences. For example, avoid saying "Are you really sure you feel that way, because I really believe...."

Avoid beginning by collecting factual details since they prompt only a terse response set which can be hard to change.

Pose all questions as closely as possible to the interview format. Do not change any words, skip any words, or add any words. Avoid explaining words or phrases if you possibly can.

Pace phrasing according to respondent's ability to comprehend. Always repeat anything that is not understood.

Remember that you have to teach the respondent how to be a respondent as you go along. Try to put him/her at ease by telling him/her that there is no need to rush and that he/she should answer the questions to his/her best ability without feeling pressured to come up with elaborate ideas. Early on, establish a rhythm wherein you briefly present a question with

the respondent replying at length. Probe where relevant. Then pose another question. Let your respondent talk but don't allow him/her to run away or gain control of the interview.

In general, a good rhythm can be easily achieved if an early question allows the respondent to explain in some detail what his/her activities are, even though all the information may not be vital. This interaction tends to develop a response set for the interviewee.

Never let the respondent feel that the interview is in any way a test of his/her knowledge or intelligence. Do not say "You must have an opinion on that. I mean everybody has some opinion on that question."

Do not let the respondent read or fill out the interview format.

The interviewer tries to obtain a true picture or measurement of opinion. Therefore you must maintain an attitude of impartiality and tolerance both before and during the interview.

Do not interject your opinions either directly or indirectly by words or gestures. Limit your remarks to neutral probes and be sure gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice do not expose your reaction to the respondent's remarks.

If you nod your head or murmur "yes" or "uh huh" occasionally to encourage the respondent to speak his/her mind, be sure it is done in a neutral manner. Do not show agreement or disagreement. The best encouragement is a businesslike attitude with an obvious effort to record what the respondent says. Leave most pleasantries until after the interview.

Recording Responses

Write answers so you will be able to understand them and to embellish them later.

Deal with each question on the format as a separate entity, the answer to which must also be able to stand by itself. 3/

The answer should not have to depend on something from a previous answer to be clear. If a question annoys a respondent because

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3/ While it is true that responses may very well be interrelated, this interpretation is allowed in your report later. Keeping each question and answer separate from others during the interview ensures that you will not automatically assume the respondent views them as interrelated. It also ensures that all questions on the format will be presented.

it seems repetitious, acknowledge that there was a similar question before, but explain that this is the first time for this specific question and that for purposes of the study you would like to have his/her answer to this one fully and separately.

Record quotes word-for-word. You may, however, paraphrase or summarize what the respondent said in reply to a broad question. If you treat the response as a serious matter, your respondent will also take his/her task seriously. Many people develop their own shorthand for taking notes, which is appropriate as long as you can later translate the responses back into the full form.

Be sure the response answers the question. Sometimes the respondent talks around a question without really answering it. Make it a rule to ask yourself "Is he/she really answering the question?"

Record details. Specific things are always desirable. Always write down the little things, the reasons why a person feels the way he/she does. Never try to judge what you think are big and important things and then exclude the rest.

Write as plainly as possible, adding explanatory statements in your notes where you feel they are needed. If the respondent refuses to answer a certain question, write the word refused under that question.

Never change a response after you have finished recording it. Sometimes embarrassing details come out in interviewing, but remember that confidentiality has been promised.

Do not erase. Cross out incorrect recordings.

Use common abbreviations for speed in recording. Later, during editing, write out all abbreviations you think might not be understood.

If the respondent speaks very quickly, and it is difficult to record all that is said, try to slow him/her down. Speak more slowly yourself and say "I write slowly, would you mind speaking a little more slowly? I want to be sure I get this down right."

The Silent Respondent

The respondent may use an "I don't know" response for a number of reasons. It is important to understand why in order to deal with it. Possible reasons include these:

- The respondent doesn't understand the question and says "I don't know" to avoid saying he/she doesn't understand.

- He/she may be thinking the question over and say "I don't know" to fill the silence while he/she thinks.

- He/she may be trying to evade the issue because he/she feels he/she is uninformed or may give a wrong answer, or because the question feels too personal.

- He/she may really not know or may have no opinion on the subject.

Remember: An expectant pause, a reassuring remark, or repeating the question all will encourage the respondent to reply.

A respondent may want to terminate the interview because he/she must respond with "I don't know" too many times and so feels embarrassed. In this case immediately reassure him/her that this is not a test of his/her knowledge and that answers are important even if he/she must answer "I don't know." Such statements as "take a moment to think about it"; "there's no hurry, take time to think that through"; "many of these questions are rather involved so take your time"; are reassuring to a respondent.

Every interviewer, at one time or another, encounters a respondent who is simply a "dud." For a range of reasons, the person is unable to respond in a useful way during the interview. If you feel you have attempted a number of the above suggestions, skillfully make a statement or pose a question that allows the interview to end on a positive note. Try to help the interviewee feel the conversation was useful to you. Thank the respondent for cooperating and comment that you may be speaking with him/her again.

Not in the Office -- Refusals -- Break-Offs

A segment of all potential respondents may never be interviewed for any of these reasons. They may not be there when you arrive; or they may refuse to cooperate when you do call or refuse to continue the interview after they have begun. Record these situations and bring them to the attention of the study coordinator.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWING VISITORS

It is important to remember that visitors do not come to museums to participate in evaluation studies; thus, any interview is making an imposition on the visitor. Great care must be taken not only to engage the visitor's cooperation, but also not to affect his/her visit negatively. Furthermore, interviews with visitors are severely hampered by time. It would be unfair to ask visitors to give up more than 10 or 15 minutes of their time to talk with you. While some visitors might truly enjoy the conversation and wish to talk for greater lengths of time, interviewers should be prepared to maximize a rather short time span. This suggests that interviewers become quite economical with their own words and allow most of the time for visitor expressions.

These kind of time-compressed interviews are exceptionally challenging. The trick is to get the best information in the least amount of time without violating the integrity of the visitor or the integrity of the interview process. The following points should help:

1. Introduce yourself and briefly describe the purpose of the study. Make it very clear that you are examining the impact of an exhibit or program on visitors. Make it even more clear that you are <u>not testing or evaluating</u> the visitor. Explain that you are trying to understand the visitor's impressions of his/her experience. Be honest!

2. Tell the visitor that you would like his/her cooperation for just a few minutes. Make a point of telling the visitor that you will be taking notes -- to remind yourself of points discussed. Promise anonymity.

3. Take the visitor off to the side so that he/she does not feel conspicious.

4. Start the interview by seeking the visitor's overall impression of the exhibit. Probe to uncover what he/she learned, what aspects were most interesting, what kind of impact the experience had, etc. Always try to demonstrate that his/her point of view is legitimate and important.

5. Never interview any visitor that you haven't observed -- at least for a little while. Use your observations of his/her behavior as both context for understanding the person's responses as well as probes during the interview itself.

6. Never correct a visitor if he/she should reveal an inaccuracy about the exhibit.

7. Make sure that the visitor understands exactly what exhibit you are studying.

8. If you are interviewing a pair or group of visitors, try to ask something of each person and record responses separately.

9. Ask the visitor wnether he/she has seen the exhibit or participated in the program before. And finally,

10. Record the visitor's occupation with some modest amount of detail. Titles can be misleading. Try to get some description of what people actually do.

THE DEBRIEFING PROCESS

(A WAY TO UNDERSTAND YOUR DATA)

The purposes of the debriefing process are varied. It is a time when, in effect, you have a conversation with yourself about the specific interview or series of interviews that has been completed. It is a period of "data massage" wherein one hypothesizes and speculates. The information is expanded, reduced, then expanded and reduced at least once more. It is at this point that inference and explanation make the data most meaningful. Some say this is the most crucial stage of the data collection process because it goes beyond mere reporting and forces one to think long and hard about what the data mean, or could mean. Because debriefing is a more abstract process than simply recording interview data, it is common to feel unsure and slightly anxious about making statements that are, in a sense, coming from you rather than an anonymous interviewer. In this regard it is important to trust your intuitions. Be aware of your biases but avail yourself of the simple fact that you are probably more familiar with your data than any secondary or tertiary reader. Your objective is to help others understand your observations and information.

The debriefing process can be used by an individual or interviewing team. It is a generic process that will allow you to think about your data from new and different perspectives. It can be employed when you are required to

- write an interview summary
- write a narrative report
- prepare arguments
- narrow issues

To our knowledge, no one has ever attempted to prescribe the "ten commandments of debriefing" as it relates to Naturalistic Evaluation. What we suggest is a series of questions that one can pose in relation to the amassed data. There is no particular order in which the questions should be asked. Not all questions need be considered. (Perhaps you will think of others.) What follows is simply an outline of queries to aid you in synthesizing and analyzing your data. These should be asked after you have read your rough notes and your narrative reports several times.

Data Expansion Questions

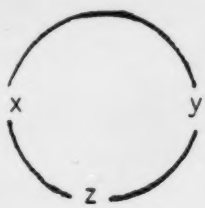
- What are the possible explanations for (a) the observed situation, (b) the stated emotion or feeling, (c) the confusion, (d) the problem? Your inferences and explanations may refer to historical factors, specific observations you made, statements written in collected documents, collected responses in agreement or disagreement, and -- YOUR THOUGHTFUL INTUITIONS.
- What solutions are offered to phenomenon x?
- What are the barriers to solutions of phenomenon x?
- If phenomenon x is occurring, then....
- Perhaps phenomenon x is occurring here but not....
- Perhaps phenomenon x is occurring here and also....
- Phenomenon y was also mentioned so that....
- Phenomenon x (or y) is occuring, therefore....

Data Reduction Questions

- What factors, situations, seem to be realted?
- Do they stem from the same source, cause, feeling?
- Is there a word that can be used to describe a number of related factors? For example, the superordinate word (or phrase) to encompass or categorize a lengthy discussion about visitors' frustration and disappointment concerning a museum program might be "Negative Visitor Reactions Toward Museum Program." Findng inclusive terms to pull a number of phenomena together is an extremely useful and clarifying process. Of course, one must be very careful in selecting the appropriate terminology. If the category is too broad, there is risk of diluting the data. If the category is too narrow, the information becomes fragmented.
- Are there relationships between and among a number of phenomena? Are they related in a linear or cirucular direction?

  i.e., Phenomenon x ⟶ Phenomenon y ⟶ Phenomenon z;

  or



- Is there a phrase that could identify the above diagrammed relationship, e.g., the relationship of the larger label and hands-on opportunity to visitor reaction?

In most instances, the process of data expansion will lead directly to the phrasing of the narrative portion of a report, and the process of data reduction will lead to the phrasing of any summary you compose. Remember, the data expansion/reduction process is repetitive. It is likely that you will engage in this process several times while interpreting a single interview, a series of interviews, or a series of reports.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS OF ALL INTERVIEWING SITUATIONS IN NATURALISTIC EVALUATION

1. Listening

Everyone probably feels that he/she is an adequate or even a good listener but actually very few of us have the listening acuity to make us truly keen listeners. As our society becomes increasingly complex, and auditory stimuli bombard us, we develop the necessary survival strategy of denying much of this input. For example, sounds of Muzak, computers, airplanes, and cars are constant elements of the environment that we commonly ignore or block out. We are further numbed by visual stimuli and have adjusted to passively receiving overwhelming amounts of information through visual media with the result that listening attention span, acuity, and comprehension are diminished. In essence, active skills have been supplanted by passive listening skills.

It is crucial that the interviewer perceive himself/herself as a finely tuned mechanism to take in, integrate, and interpret what the speaker is saying. This is a dynamic process that continues throughout the interview. Listening is the vehicle of effective conversation. For this study it is the building block of the data collection process. Active listening promotes a rich, in-depth interview from which useful and appropriate interpretations can emerge.

Perhaps the most important thing we can say about listening is that however well we think we do it now, we can and must do it more effectively to get the most out of the interviews.

Behaviors for an Active Listener

- Concentrate on the speaker's message rather than on what you will say next.

- Synthesize and analyze the speaker's message on the spot. Synthesizing requires summarizing in process, separating "wheat from chaff." Analyzing requires that you put the summary in some context allowing for various interpretations.

  SYNTHESIS: "So you are telling me that with the widespread public you serve, designing intriguing and exciting exhibits that will last many years is your largest problem."

  ANALYSIS: "It is more of a budget problem, a content problem, or perhaps a personnel problem?"

2. Observing

We have discussed the concept of unobtrusive measurement and its relationship to sharp observational skills. Other strategies for systematic observation are equally important. During an interview, the observer should notice:

- the speaker's behavior (dress, body language, expressions, voice, interactions with others)
- the immediate physical environment (office, home, classroom)
- the contextual environment (building, community)

The report of the interview should deal with both the interview situation itself and the information gained from asking questions. In each of these areas statements should be made about the speaker's behavior, the immediate environment, and the contextual environment. Entries for the interview process and elicited information would be different, however, as the following examples illustrate:

Example 1: Observation of the Speaker's Behavior

Interview Situation	Elicited Information
"The respondent appeared to be anxious about my mission. He was reluctant at first to relate his staff position. He played with paper clips and erasers the whole time I spoke with him."	"The respondent became upset as he described the staff tensions. He relaxed again when he described the good relations between the staff and the local public."

Example 2: Observations of the Contextual Environment

Interview Situation	Elicited Information
"Dr. Bear's office was cold and austere. While he described his feelings about humane institutions and the warm relationships that existed in the museum, his own personal space appeared contradictory to the image he tried to portray."	"Dr. Bear spoke of tense personnel relationships suggesting that staff and administrators feel they have little private space or private time. He stated that the building is so crowded that there is no room for a staff lounge."

A word of warning: While observations are a necessary and intriguing component of Naturalistic Evaluation, it is important to maintain one's sense of what information is relevant to record. Bizarre information or inappropriate inferences drawn from highly idiosyncratic occurrences may serve to distort, dilute, or dangerously threaten other data that are vital to the study.

3. Questioning

The process of asking appropriate questions in Naturalistic Evaluation relies heavily on one's ability to listen actively and respond in a way that generates more response from the interviewee. Standard interview forms typically allow the interviewer to follow set questions in sequence, record the respondent's answers, and terminate the interview. This study method, however, relies on an open-ended format which seeks to generate full and individual responses to the initial question by following it with hypothesizing, recapitulation, eliciting specific examples, and probing. The interviewer must listen actively and closely, using skillful judgment of when to probe, to recapitulate, etc. Each interview thus takes its own individual and unique shape. Furthermore, because of this on-the-spot expansion, the interviewee can correct, illustrate, or clarify the content.

Hypothesizing

A common type of hypothesizing is forming "if-then" statements. The "if" part is generally related to the preceding information the speaker has given. The "then" part is more abstract and develops from your understanding of the issues, the information the speaker has given, and your ability to postulate cause-effect relationships. Some other hypothetical phrases are as follows:

Given this...would that....
What would happen if....
Is it because...or is it because....

Example of Hypothesizing

Docent Trainer: "We only have two docents in our program who have had any training in anthropology."

Interviewer: "If you had more trained docents, then would you feel more confident about informational accuracy and docent ability to handle questions?"

Recapitulating

At various points in the interview you may want to summarize what the speaker has said -- sometimes for your benefit and sometimes for his/hers. Be forewarned that it is not uncommon for a speaker to be a bit uncomfortable with your summation even if it is entirely accurate. Nevertheless, recapitulation aids your understanding of the speaker's perspective while you are *in situ* and can serve as a reliability check. Often it will stimulate the speaker to embellish and/or clarify the original statement. Common recapitulation starters are these:

So you are saying that....
I want to be sure I understand what you are saying....
Let me see if I understand what you are telling me....

While recapitulation is not a direct questioning behavior, it functions indirectly to alert the interviewee to respond to your summary. (Incidentally, the act of verbally summarizing in an interview tends to aid later narrative and interpretive reporting.)

Eliciting Specific Examples

Much can be learned when an individual is asked to relate an example or incident that clarifies a statement or series of statements. The example may alter your interpretation of what has been said thus far; it may reveal new information; or it may simply drive home a point. The example may be unrelated to the issue at point, alterting you to pause and attempt to clarify where you are. Common questions for eliciting examples are these:

Do you recall any particular instances of that?
Is there a recent example of what you're saying?
Could you describe an experience that illustrates?

The examples respondents give tend to by highly informative and rich in interest. Attempt to incorporate them into narrative and summary reports. Be as meticulous in recording examples as in recording verbatim quotes, since both are likely to be good for bases of further investigation.

Probing

This is a technique used by the interviewer to stimulate discussion and obtain more information. Probes motivate the interviewee to respond more fully by enlarging his/her statement, clarifying it, or explaining the reasons behind it. They can also focus the discussion on the specific content of the interview so that irrelevant and unnecessary information can be eliminated. Probes must perform these two functions without introducing bias. Probing is essential when the initial response to a question is incomplete, irrelevant, unclear, or inconsistent.

Following are several types of probes that can be used to encourage the interviewee to communicate more fully:

Reassuring sounds. Saying such things as "uh huh," or "I see," or "yes," or "That's interesting," indicates that the interviewer has heard the response given so far, is interested, and expects more.

An expectant pause. The pause often accompanied by an expectant look or nod of the head allows the respondent time to gather his/her thoughts. It is the simplest way of saying to the respondent that he/she has begun to answer the question but you feel that he/she has more to say. One caution is appropriate: if the respondent is out of ideas, the pause will not stimulate any further discussion.

Repeating the question. When the respondent does not seem to understand the question, when he/she misinterprets it, when he/she seems unable to make up his/her mind, or when he/she strays from the subject, it is very useful to repeat the question just as it is written in the format. Many respondents hearing a question for the second time realize what kind of response is expected.

Repeating the interviewee's response. Simply repeating what the respondent has said as soon as he/she has stopped talking is often an excellent probe. This can be done as you are taking notes, so that you are actually repeating the respondent's reply and recording at the same time. Hearing his/her idea repeated often stimulates further thought by the respondent.

Neutral questions or comments. Neutral questions or comments are frequently used to obtain clearer and fuller responses. Examples:

What do you mean?
Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?

Will you tell me what you have in mind?
I am not sure I understand what you have in mind.
Why do you think this is so?
Could you tell me why you feel this way?
Which figure do you think comes closest?
What do you think causes that?
Anything else?

Such questions indicate the interviewer is interested and they make a direct bid for more information. This technique requires that the interviewer recognize immediately just how the respondent's answer has failed to meet the objective of the question. The interviewer must then formulate a neutral type of question to elicit the information needed.

Asking for further clarification. It is sometimes a good technique for the interviewer to indicate that he/she doesn't quite understand what the respondent is trying to say (for example, "I'm not quite sure what you mean...could you tell me a little more?"). This technique can arouse the respondent's desire to cooperate with a human being trying to do a good job. (However, the respondent should not get the feeling that the interviewer doesn't know when a question is properly answered or can't understand the respondent.) This approach is very useful in dealing with what appears to be an answer that is inconsistent with previous answers. For example, the interviewer might say, "I am sorry, but I am not sure I understood. Did you mention previously...?" and then briefly mention the respondent's earlier answer. It is important that you appear to ask this question because you did not understand. Do not appear to contradict or cross-examine the respondent in any way. If you feel you cannot ask for clarification of an inconsistent answer without upsetting the respondent, simply go on with the other questions.

Examples of Probes

Question: "Considering the Museum as a whole, do you think we will have better conditions during the next year, or worse conditions, or what?"

Answer 1: "Yes, I do." (What does the respondent mean? Better conditions? Worse conditions? He has not answered the question.)

Possible probes: "I see" (followed by an expectant pause). "What do you mean?" "Would you say then that..." (repeat the question). "Can you tell me more about your thinking on that?"

Answer 2: "Maybe better, maybe worse. It all depends." (The respondent has not answered the question.)

Possible probes: "Uh huh" (pause and expectant look). "What do you have in mind?" "Can you tell me more about your thinking on that?"

Answer 3: "I hope we have better conditions." What does the respondent think will happen? Are his/her hopes and wishes the same as he/she expects? This answer is irrelevant and does not meet the question objectives.

Possible probes: "We hope so, but what do you think?" "I see, but what do you think will happen?" "Yes, but..." (repeat the question).

4. Note-taking

It is important that each interview be carefully documented. In Naturalistic Evaluation, this becomes a demanding task since a standardized interview form listing each specific question and probe is not used. Your note-taking skills will affect the way you can conduct the interview as well as how the narrative report and final summary are presented.

Key words and phrases recorded in the interview can facilitate recapitulation and the generation of relevant probes. Note-taking, however, must not intrude on the interview. It must be accurate

but not time-consuming. It must be indicative of the content but not a word-for-word account. Record vivid quotes, but summarize the message the speaker is giving. By attending to "the message" you are free to observe the speaker as he/she is talking. Your behavior appears more casual and this, in turn, puts the respondent at ease.

After each interview has ended, it is quite beneficial to find a quiet spot and allow five to ten minutes to add to your notes by recording additional observations, points to ponder, summative statements and overall impressions.

Suggestions for Note-Taking

1. Use a small tablet-type notebook. This is handy, non-threatening to the respondent, and easy to manipulate.
2. Record statements in an organized way. It is useful to enumerate as you go.
3. Develop a system of abbreviations appropriate to the study. V(visitors) RL (reads label) DA(dinosaur area)
4. Record a special mark when you are paraphrasing a statement. Use quotes when you record verbatim.
5. Simple diagrams often summarize a lengthy explanation of a system or particular program.
6. When finalizing your notes after the interview, try to indicate contradictions, unique perspectives, etc. Also, ask yourself, "What did I learn as a result of this conversation?"

5. Using the Data

Those conducting an investigation should meet frequently during the fact-finding process in order to draw inferences, raise new questions, and adjust the scope, focus, and schedule of the interviews accordingly. The data will constantly confirm or suggest questions for exploration and vantage points for getting more data. The process is inductive. It moves from recording specific facts to compiling series of facts to interpreting the facts.

As the interview schedule comes to a close, the following questions are appropriate:

1. Does the evidence support/reject particular answers to proposed issues and subissues?

2. What new questions does the evidence raise? Should we attempt to answer them? Should we pursue other leads and chase down other clues?

3. How does the data developed through Naturalistic Evaluation tie into other relevant information? (A multi-method approach is likely to help answer difficult questions and present a persuasive report in which facts, figures, descriptive analysis, and other information are built into a compelling case and set of proposals.)

6. Reporting (for interviews, for interim reports, for final reports)

Accurate informative reporting is the ultimate challenge. It is at this point when, in effect, one must commit oneself in writing to making inferences and explanations from the collected data. While the data exist in a concrete sense, explanations derived from the data are more abstract. When generalizing from the data, we, as investigators and reporters, must recognize our responsibility to portray the truth as accurately as we know how. The inferences we make must be reasonable and the explanations must be sensitive, responsive, and intelligent interpretations of the data

An overriding concern of the writer must be the production of readable documents that are useful to the evaluation audience. We believe that our reports on completed studies (see the annotated bibliography on New Perspectives on Evaluating Museum Environments available from the Museum Reference Center, Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution) can serve as a useful model to those who would choose to engage in this type of research.

Reports need not be lengthy or filled with "million-dollar" words. It is often said that it is far more difficult to write succinctly than it is to compose many pages badly in need of intelligent summary. While writing, keep in mind the following question: What is important for me to report?

Each formal interview should result in one written product composed of two sections. The first section is a narrative of the interview. Simply describe the context and the conversation. The second portion of the report is an explanation of what the conversation implies, what solutions and problems are relevant. This section is dependent on your abilities to synthesize, analyze, hypothesize, speculate, etc. The final page of the report is a summary of the entire report with the emphasis on a brief summary of the explanation portion. (Refer to the section on debriefing for guidelines on how to compose an explanation and summary.)

Checklist for a Report

Did I do the following:

- Record facts rather than experiences?
- Explain the background to the situation being observed?
- Describe "costumes, props, and the stage?"
- Use accurate, detailed descriptions of actions and behaviors?
- Report word-for-word statements where appropriate?
- Report whether interaction with informants was effective and whether informants were reliable?
- Work effectively with reliable witnesses and informants?
- Report on any important trace effects or wear spots?
- Use documents to add to my observations?
- Report natural and typical conditions?
- Report whether I became involved to the extent that it was disruptive or unnatural?
- Have pre-formed opinions or "axes to grind?"
- Make interpretations that flow directly from the data?

INTERVIEWING -- CAVEATS AND SUGGESTIONS

Probably everyone starting to interview wishes there were a list of rules he/she could follow, but unfortunately, this is impossible because interviewing takes place between human beings who are much too individualized to be reduced to a formula. To be sure, there are certain psychological traits that characterize most people, most of the time, and a skillful interviewer will do well to keep some of the more important of these in mind. Interviewing is an art, a skilled technique that can be improved and eventually perfected primarily through continued practice.

Important Points to Consider in Interviewing

- Since much human motivation is unconscious, the interviewer should be tolerant and avoid passing judgment on divergent attitudes if he/she is to facilitate the interview process.
- Every situation has objective and subjective facts. Both are legitimate and important, but the interviewer must try to understand the difference.
- Negative feelings are often concealed but may be significant -- the interviewer must cautiously probe for hostile feelings.
- An emotional relationship, positive or negative, will naturally develop between respondent and interviewer. Don't try to eliminate this relationship but try to control its nature and intensity.
- Try to be aware of your own prejudices and not let them influence the interview. The tendency to condem all behavior that conflicts with one's own standards is natural but damaging in the research setting.
- Record not only what the respondent says but what he/she does not say. Observe behavior, attitudes, etc.
- Accept silences. A good listener waits patiently during the times when the respondent is thinking silently, so he/she can formulate his/her answer easily.
- Try to help the respondent to relax.
- Always interview in a setting where the respondent will not be distracted or uncomfortable.
- Do not be afraid to ask the respondent to repeat and/or clarify a response.
- Look for contradictions -- make a note of them.
- The first words a respondent says are often significant. Record them.
- Write a summary of the interview as soon as possible, especially before engaging in another interview, so that responses don't get confused. Include notes on the demeanor of the interviewee -- cooperativeness, hostility, articulateness, accuracy of response, knowledge of the issues, etc.

DESIRABLE SKILLS AND QUALITIES OF AN INTERVIEWER

A good interviewer must have quite an array of personal qualities and interviewing skills in relating to people, all of which ultimately facilitate eliciting full, relevant, in-depth but broad responses to the interview questions. Many of the abilities listed imply great flexibility, versatility and keen judgment of how to handle oneself and the interaction at each moment.

In presenting him/herself in the situation and relating to the respondent, the interviewer should do the following:

- Be able to structure his/her role in a realistic nonthreatening way.
- Be able to observe a situation while being involved in it.
- Be at ease but not overly casual, friendly but not too familiar and chatty, curious and investigative but not nosy or pushy.
- Show sincere interest in the interviewee and respect for his/her feelings and opinions, empathizing without becoming involved.
- Show curiosity and pleasure in listening without diverting attention to him/herself or interjecting his/her own feelings and opinions.
- Stay neutral and uninvolved in feelings or issues.
- Be self-confident but not opinionated, rigid, or moralistic.
- Be self-aware, seeing him/herself as others do in the situation and noticing how he/she is functioning.
- Be able to keep calm in charged situations, to take rebuffs without flaring back, to tolerate changing moods and divergent opinions while keeping reactions private.
- Be able to keep personal projections at a minimum and yet retain insights.
- Be tolerant of a variety of types of people and situations and be able to relate quickly to each situation or person on his/her own terms.

- Be quick to perceive the details of a new situation, understand the relationships, grasp the terminology, and adjust one's stance and tactics appropriately. This may mean being more reserved and formal in one situation and more open and informal in another.

- Be at ease in an unstructured, open-ended situation yet not allow the interview to become either a casual visit or a discussion of irrelevant subjects.

- Be able to shift roles easily as the situation suggests, from active probing to passive but attentive listening, from eager, curious questioning to reserved observing.

- Be able to draw the respondent out without manipulating his or her responses in any way.

- Have a keen sense of timing, encouraging responses and keeping the interview moving, but allowing spaces of silence for the respondent to think and form his/her response.

- Know how fast to move from superficial to more personal, sensitive subjects.

- Be invested in the interview and the project but keep a sense of balance, objectivity, and perspective.

- Have a sense of humor.

Other interviewer characteristics are important relative to dealing with the data during the interview and later in the report. The interviewer should:

- Be conscientious in recording data and in writing reports.

- Have clear writing.

- Have a memory for names and details.

- Be flexible in recording, able to remember accurately when notetaking is inappropriate and to reduce information to brief notes that can still be returned to full form in reporting.

- Quickly grasp the organization, its relationship and terminology, and the interviewee's relationship to it and perspective.

- Be creative in framing questions and responses to draw out new material.

- Be able to think ahead of the informant.

- Be able to draw out data without manipulating responses.
- Be able to analyze feelings.
- Be sensitive to possible productive digressions.
- Seek out wide-ranging implications, think in many directions, be creative.
- Be able to identify rumors and sift them from reliable data.
- Be flexible and open to new, unanticipated responses; be unprejudiced and follow rather than direct the respondent's thinking.
- Include data that contradict hypotheses and may lead to modifications or rejection of them.
- Listen to prejudiced, false, or malicious statements while continuing to support the speaker.
- Keep to the subject in the broadest way, relating data to a theoretical framework without distorting the data.
- Be able to keep the ultimate research objectives always in mind.
- Be able to interpret research projects in line with established policy, both in formal talks and in informal conversation.

Finally, ethical considerations require that the interviewer should:

- Maintain confidences and keep field notes secure.
- Refrain from criticism and gossip.
- Refrain from passing judgment on other's behavior or on social situations.
- Respect other's customs, values, and mannerisms.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, persons employing Naturalistic Evaluation interviewing strategies need to possess a variety of skills so as to maximize the information that any single data collection episode can produce. While these interviewing skills are critical, and must be mastered by those conducting Naturalistic Evaluations in museum settings, they do not define all of the skills necessary for full implementation of the Naturalistic Evaluation approach. Other skill areas such as data analysis, documentation, and reports writing have all been mentioned in this monograph, but have not been treated specifically as interview techniques. Subsequent monographs will be devoted to these other requisite capabilities so that persons interested in conducting Naturalistic Evaluation studies in museums will have a more complete set of guidelines upon which more meaningful evaluations efforts can be based. It is hoped that such guidelines would not only encourage persons to engage in Naturalistic Evaluation strategies, but also provide a framework that would lead to better utilization of evaluation findings within museum contexts.